

# CHAPTER

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# 4

The Mediterranean Region  
faced with the World Park  
Congress 2003



## From Málaga to Durban. Reflections about the contributions made by the Mediterranean to the fifth World Congress of Protected Areas

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### Introduction

The World Park Congress is convened every ten years as the single and most important international forum for protected areas. This event provides a unique opportunity for carrying out an analysis of the development of protected areas (PAs) and for objectively assessing forward and backward steps, as a starting point to steer the course of the world agenda on protected areas over the coming decade.

The Congress is an extremely important international event for its organizing body, the IUCN, for it will contribute to shape the Union's long - term programme concerning protected areas, and to identify new ideas and concepts to be promoted in the global agendas linked to the environment and the sustainable development. Although the first Park Congress (Seattle, USA, 1962) did not focus on a specific theme, all subsequent congresses have been milestones in priority aspects linked to the establishment and the management of protected areas (see box).

#### *Themes dealt with in the different Congresses*

- 1972, concurrently held in two different venues: the National Parks of Yellowstone and Grand Teton, USA. Theme: "*National Parks – Heritage for a Better World*". The importance was highlighted of parks as a part of Mankind's heritage. Many of the ideas discussed were examined in UNESCO's Mankind Heritage Convention (Paris, 1972).
- 1982, Bali, Indonesia. Theme: "*Parks for Development*". The importance was highlighted of protected areas as options for economic development, at a local and at a national level, and the idea of participatory management of protected areas was promoted.
- 1992, Caracas, Venezuela. Theme: "*Parks for Life*". The importance was promoted of integrating the management of the PAs into regional planning, and that of enhancing participation by local communities and other agents in the establishment and management of PAs.

The challenge that the Fifth World Park Congress (Durban, Republic of South Africa, 2003) will have to face up to will be to demonstrate the significance of protected areas for the different international and regional agendas in the economic, social and environmental fields. The theme of the Congress, “*Benefits Beyond Borders*”, is aimed at encouraging a wider - ranging thinking on protected areas, which are facing a rapidly changing world: existing challenges, opportunities, values, responsibilities of different agents linked with protected areas and benefits provided by environmental products and services originating in the said areas.

Even though for many the main objective of the Durban Congress focuses on how to show the “benefits” stemming from protected areas, there is none the less a tendency to overlook an important perspective of the congress’ theme: that of working “beyond the borders”. It is within this scope that IUCN has attached special importance to this regional event on “Environmental connectivity: protected areas in the Mediterranean context”, for it is in line with one of the priority themes to be discussed in Durban: how to achieve better linkages and connectivity between protected areas and the surrounding landscape.

This presentation is putting forward a series of ideas for their discussion about which contribution could be made by the Mediterranean to the Durban Congress. The said ideas do start from a personal analysis of the peculiarities, the opportunities and the challenges the region is being faced with as regards connectivity - related initiatives and bioregional projects; they must, accordingly, be deemed to be technical opinions expressed by an expert and not statements or opinions uttered on behalf of IUCN.

### *The Mediterranean. A special case?*

The history of the development of society in the Mediterranean basin, the *mare nostrum* of the ancients’, is characterized by the existence, lasting millennia, of close environmental and cultural links that have conditioned the use of its natural resources. Trade and shipping did determine the development of farming in the lands close to coastal areas or to navigable rivers providing access to the main ports. The importance of the production and commerce of salt – which for many years was used as legal tender – led to the development of numerous small salt works in the coastal wetlands, which today are important areas for the

preservation of birds in the region (Birdlife International, 2000; Marín, C., pers. com., 2001). Fishing was, and still is, one of the region's main economic activities, as well as an important source of conflicts, which, however, has not resulted in paying greater attention to the use of marine protected areas as a mechanism for the preservation of fisheries. This is reflected on the fact that up to the mid - nineties only 11.8% (0.2 millions hectares) of the expanse encompassed by the whole of the protected areas in the Mediterranean coast (1.7 million hectares) were devoted to the protection of marine environments (IUCN, 1995).

On the other hand, the development of important civilizations and cultures in the Mediterranean has been closely linked to the protection of natural areas. In 1240, under the reign of Abou Zakaria, a member of the Hafside dynasty, game reserves were created and protected in Lake Ichkeul, Tunis, which continued to be managed until the times of the Ottoman Empire in the Twentieth Century. Today some of these reserves are part of the Ichkeul National Park. The Greeks and the Romans were, perhaps, the first to establish protected areas. In the *Natural History*, written by Caius Plinius Secundus, actions are described which were taken by the Roman Empire for the establishment of forest systems and other areas, which were specially controlled and protected with a view to preserving wildlife (Mallet, 1991). On the other hand, special mention must be made of the *bema* system, drawn up under Islam and which the prophet Muhammad consolidated by means of a legal framework which continues to rule the management of these protected areas for the benefit of the communities. It can, therefore be said that the Mediterranean, in contrast to other regions, has a millennia - old experience concerning protected areas.

The interaction between man and nature which has characterized Europe's development throughout the millennia, including the Mediterranean, has left a special mark in the landscape which has acted as the basis for the development of the concept of cultural landscapes. Up to relatively recent times, cultural landscapes were not, as a rule, the focus of international attention as conservation mechanisms. In many cases this was subordinated to the erroneous conception that it was an "Euro-centric" concept, and basically interested in the external appearance of the landscape and not in the preservation of natural areas.

During the Fourth World Park Congress (Caracas, Venezuela, 1992) the concept of cultural landscape was the subject of intense debate and was finally accepted, which had an influence on the definition of the Fifth Category,

*Protected Landscapes*; one of the six categories for the management of protected areas included in the international system suggested by the IUCN (IUCN, 1994). In point of fact, this constitutes an undeniable contribution by Europe to the protected area international movement, a contribution which has been supported by the results of research into conservation biology which have shown the need to promote actions for the conservation and management of natural resources at a regional scale, beyond the boundaries of the protected areas, by linking them to other forms of land use and by promoting the establishment of biological corridors. The importance of achieving connectivity between the PAs and the surrounding landscapes has also benefited from the support of a better understanding of the nature - culture relationship: quite often sites having a high biological diversity share the same location with sites of rich cultural diversity which are the result of a lasting and continuous interaction between man and his environment (Brown and Mitchell, 2000).

### ***What is the situation like in the Mediterranean?***

Bearing in mind the European influence on the conceptual and practical development of protected landscapes (Fifth Category, IUCN) as well as the numerous initiatives leading to the establishment of biological corridors, both at the level of region and at that of the individual country (IUCN, 1994; Synge, 1997), and on the basis that Mediterranean landscapes are predominantly cultural ones, it would be only natural to think that the development and the putting into effect of this concept has been widely accepted in all the countries making up the Mediterranean region. However, this is not the case.

While in the countries belonging to the Northern shore of the Mediterranean basin, protected landscapes (Fifth Category, IUCN) constitute 65% of the whole expanse devoted to protected areas, Northern African and Middle Eastern countries only account for 8% of all protected areas. While in the European part of the Mediterranean the establishment of biological corridors and other actions intended for the enhancement of connectivity between protected areas are promoted by means of regional initiatives such as Natura 2000, ECMEN and EECNET, and have the support of the European Convention on Landscape, in the southern part of the Mediterranean basin similar initiatives are coming about in an isolated manner at a national or sub - national level, and are not envisaged in the majority of national legislations on protected areas, according to which the

use of more restrictive management categories are still given a greater weight (First to Fourth Categories. IUCN).

Taking all the preceding in consideration, the Mediterranean is, in fact, a special case: it is a region which shares ecosystems of national as well as of international importance, with common roots as regards social development which have conditioned the predominance of cultural landscapes which alternate with important cultural areas. As it happens in many areas of the planet, the protection and the management of this shared ecosystem – the Mediterranean one – require the effort of all the countries for which a legal framework already exists – the 1996 Barcelona Convention – and institutional mechanisms – such as PNUMA's Mediterranean Action Plan and the Centre for Regional Activities for Specially Protected Areas – which enable the coordination and the promotion of the said efforts. Several ONGs, both national and international, many of which are members of IUCN, are also working in the area. In addition, there is a large network of experts who support the work of IUCN within the framework of their different commissions; in the main, through the Commission for the Survival of Species and the World Commission for Protected Areas. In short, the Mediterranean basin is a region where much has been achieved, but where much more still has to be done.

### ***European Convention on Landscape (CEL)***

The CEL will come into effect upon its ratification by ten Member States. Its purpose is that of *promoting the protection, the management and the planning of landscapes, as well as that of organizing European cooperation in matters related to landscapes* (Art. 3). The CEL takes all landscapes into consideration including *natural, rural, urban and peri - urban areas* (Art. 2) and does not focus on protected areas. However, it is a very important legal framework in matters related to connectivity for it advocates:

- The recognition of the concept of landscape in the national legislation;
- The development of policies concerning the planning, the protection and the management of the landscape;
- The development of procedures intended for public participation in the planning and the management of the landscape;
- The integration of the concept of landscape into the regional and urban planning policies;

- The adoption of specific policies concerning public awareness, training and education, and the definition of criteria on the quality of landscape, and;
- Regional cooperation in the implementation of policies and programmes, the exchange of information and the joint work in the planning, protection and management of trans - border landscapes.

### **The Durban congress: Opportunities and challenges for the Mediterranean**

As it has already been mentioned, all park congresses have been milestones in the world protected area movement, and no less is expected from the Durban Congress. This congress is even more important than the preceding ones, for it takes place against the background of the beginning of a new century, which makes it possible to analyse the achievements attained and the problems still to be solved, as well as the way to face them.

The new century also brings new challenges and opportunities: the political power is being decentralized; a large amount of information is available to us by just clicking in our computers; the effects of the climatic change – which up to very recently were treated as mere “speculations” – are beginning to make themselves felt in many regions, and are drawing everyone’s attention to the need to re - establish the ecological processes that rule the planet; the need has been accepted to work at a bioregional level and to put into effect an approach to the management of ecosystems; citizens are gaining increasing access to the planning and decision - making processes; new tools and methods have been developed to be used in financial planning, adaptive management and accounting in the management of natural resources. On the other hand, the world is finding itself more divided every day, differences between the rich and the poor are growing increasingly larger and in many cases are acting as triggers for a large number of conflicts. Accordingly, the main challenge the Durban Congress has to face is how to achieve a repositioning of the important role that protected areas can play in favour of mankind in the Twenty - first Century.



*What is the significance of the Durban congress for the Mediterranean?*

The region can ready itself for the Durban Congress by using two approaches: (a) a “*traditional*” approach: What have we achieved?, or (b) an “*avant-garde*” approach: Where would we like to be when the Sixth Park Congress takes place?

Without a doubt, both approaches are necessary. Lessons learned from the past can help us to plan for the future, but the fundamental question is: where are we to place the emphasis and the regional efforts for Durban?

The “*traditional*” approach can be in keeping with the preparation of a set of specific products:

- Regional report on progress made, experience and lessons learned from putting into effect the principles of connectivity and bioregional planning in the Mediterranean. Identification of barriers, be they legal, institutional or in the nature of technical skills limiting the implementation of these principles, and how to overcome these barriers.
- Report on the state of protected areas – terrestrial and marine – in the region. Identification of biogeographical voids which must be filled in order to strengthen the Regional Network of PAs, and identification of the management categories that ought to be used to provide a response to a wide range of conservation and development objectives.
- Progress made in putting into effect important regional programmes linked to the planning and the management of PAs, including those being led by IUCN such as the Action Plan for European Protected Areas: “Parks for Life”.

Even though these analyses are necessary and will undoubtedly make a positive contribution to the agenda of the Durban Congress, it would be advisable that specialists from the region see *the process leading to the Congress as a unique opportunity for the devising and launching of new initiatives*. In this regard, the use should be assessed of the institutional capabilities which exist in the region, and the energy of the specialists and technicians working in it should be channelled into the preparation of new initiatives that could be set in motion in Durban, as a mechanism intended for the securing of additional funds and support that may enable the implementation of the said initiatives. Some of the possibilities to be considered could include:

- *The launch of a Mediterranean initiative concerning Marine - Coastal Corridors*: the conservation and the sustainable use of many of the region's shared ecosystems - such as marine meadows and coral reefs of vital importance for the conservation of fisheries - could benefit from a project of that magnitude. The said project could be in keeping with and could support other initiatives which are carried out within the framework of the Mediterranean Action Plan, or actions linked to the Bonn Convention, such as the Agreement for the Conservation of Cetaceans in the Black Sea, the Mediterranean and adjoining areas in the Atlantic (AIDE, 2001). Ambitious though the idea can be, it is worth mentioning that the Central and Southern American regions are currently working on the design of a marine corridor running from the Cocos Islands, in Costa Rica, and the Galapagos in Ecuador, an initiative that has attracted interest from PNUD and GEF.
- *Mediterranean Alliance for Tourism and Protected Areas*: the tourist industry is an important source of income for the region – although it has also been the cause of significant environmental and social impacts – which could become a new ally in the conservation of protected areas. In spite of the fact that this is a very varied sector, it could be possible to promote an approach to the segment linked to the development of maritime cruises. A similar initiative is being discussed in the Caribbean region with a view to its being launched during the Durban Congress.
- *Development of a “Mediterranean Position” on Protected Areas*: this might be a document of a technical nature that could be incorporated into the framework of the region's agendas of environmental and socio-economic policies. For many years, in the Mediterranean basin as well as in other regions, the use of the American model of national parks has prevailed , giving rise to what has been known as “the children of Yellowstone” (Everhart, 1972, pp. 200). Taking the environmental and social reality of the Mediterranean into consideration – including the importance of cultural landscapes – it would be interesting to define and to put forward which is the region's vision of protected areas and which would be the most appropriate models to be put into effect in the future. Without any doubt such “Mediterranean Position” would be an important input into the “Durban Agreement” and would favour a common conceptual framework for future work in the region.

- *Action Plan for the Mediterranean by the World Commission of Protected Areas (WCPA)*: up to now, the work carried out by WCPA has been compartmentalized into two regions: Europe and Northern Africa - Middle East. Both WCPA regions have their respective Action Plans; it would be proper to ask whether this compartmentation can be really maintained when facing the needs and challenges posed by the Mediterranean. Could it not be possible to put forward an ecosystemic approach to the commission's work in order to strengthen and promote the exchange of knowledge and experiences between the Northern and the Southern shores of the Mediterranean? A plan of this kind would give valuable support to the work of the IUCN's Centre for Cooperation in the Mediterranean, as well as that of other institutions operating in the region.

The preceding paragraphs contain just a few ideas to be discussed by specialists in the Mediterranean when dealing with the process of regional preparation prior to the Durban Congress. Their purpose is that of encouraging a proactive approach to the Congress and to take the best possible advantage of this unique opportunity for influencing the Agenda for Protected Areas for the Twenty - first century. The Fifth Park Congress must not be seen as the end of this process but as a stage within the framework of a long - term programme that leads us from Malaga to Durban and from Durban to wherever the Sixth World Park congress may be held. This regional process must bear in mind the theme of the Congress: "Benefits Beyond Borders". Many are, undoubtedly, the borders that still have to be broken to achieve more effective actions, not only in the protected areas but also in the landscape surrounding them, aiming at the conservation and sustainable use of the region's resources for the benefit of Mediterranean societies.

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